

September 11th and “The Clash of Civilizations“

by Samuel Huntington

Prof. Radoslav Stojanović

Euro-Atlantic Club, Belgrade

The direct consequences of September 11th are complex enough to merit renewed attention. Not only the war in Afghanistan, but also the current threat that war will spread to Iraq and the other countries of the "Axis of Evil" are sufficiently clear indications of the general sense of fear and a growing feeling of insecurity.

All such direct responses to new challenges provoke other reflections as well: Was September 11th perhaps a harbinger of the beginning of a clash of civilizations?

Conflicts between Islamic and Christian states have gone on for a thousand years, with frequent changes of fortune. In 711 the Arabs conquered Spain, at a time when Islamic civilization was superior to Christianity, while at the end of the twelfth century France halted their further advance. The Arabs were expelled from Spain only in 1492. Byzantium, with its power, wealth, science, art and literature, was the centre of European civilization (A. Toynbee) from the eighth through the fifteenth centuries, when it, as well as Serbia, fell under Ottoman rule.

Following the second siege of Vienna in 1683, the Christian civilization of the West developed rapidly. It is interesting to note that the defeat of the Ottomans at Vienna coincided with the beginning of parliamentary democracy in England which, by freeing human creativity, ushered in the Industrial Revolution in that country one hundred years later.

This marked the beginning of a change of the world's political map, as European powers swiftly extended their hold over the entire world. Before World War I, the West had established political and economic control over 90 percent of the world's territory. Russia also took part in this conquest, as an "adjunct" to Western Christian civilization.

When the killing started in former Yugoslavia, with consequences that continue to remind us of the horrors we witnessed, an article by Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington appeared in Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Review, entitled The Clash of Civilizations. In Huntington's own words, that article in Foreign Affairs stirred up more discussion in three years than any other the journal had published since the 1940s, and certainly more debate than anything else he had written. For these reasons, Huntington decided to expand the article and publish it as a book, which was also subsequently published in Yugoslavia (Podgorica, 1998).

In addition to general assessments of the changes that have taken place after the collapse of communism and the disintegration of its military-political bloc, Huntington presents his own specific view of those developments. He claims that, spurred by modernization, global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines. Peoples and countries from different cultures are drifting apart. Alignments defined by ideology and superpower relations are giving way to alignments defined by cultures and civilizations. Cultural

communities are replacing the Cold War blocs, and the fault-lines between civilizations are becoming the mainlines of global politics. This is Huntington's basic thesis regarding contemporary international relations. The originality of this idea is reflected, if nothing else, by his contention that such divisions have never occurred before in history. Quite the contrary, it is well known that, on countless occasions, countries belonging to different civilizations entered into alliances in times of war among states. Does Huntington's contention mean that we should not expect conflicts within civilizations in the future? Such an assertion, would be, at the very least, unsubstantiated by the evidence.

A Clash of Islamic and Christian Civilizations?

Perhaps Huntington somehow knows that countries and peoples in Europe will align along "cultural lines". However, such an arrangement could take place only if a policy of excluding and isolating Russia and its, as Huntington calls them, potential allies (its "Orthodox brothers") were to be undertaken. Such political folly is probably unimaginable at this moment, as well as in the future. If one were to believe Huntington (he offers no evidence, and so has to be taken at his word), then I, too, would have to join the club of "conspiracy theorists", which would make me lose my self-respect.

This argument is much more relevant with regard to Islam because of its very dangerous fundamentalist extremism, whose aggressiveness has frightened the entire world, including Muslims themselves, for some time now.

Huntington is quite right when he claims that, at the macro-level, the most troubled lines of division are the fault-lines between Islam and its Orthodox, Hindu, African and Western Christian neighbours. He goes on to say that, in the future, dangerous conflicts will most probably arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance and Sinic assertiveness. In this process, Islamic countries have raised fundamentalism as a barrier to the onslaught of Western values. They have done so particularly ever since the general level of political power and cultural development in some Islamic countries increased, due to wealth generated by oil and independently of the Western education system, through which earlier generations of Islamic social elites had passed.

After their liberation from colonialism, and with new wealth generated by oil, Islamic countries embarked on the road towards a reaffirmation of Islam, in an attempt to counter the consequences of Western colonization. By accepting Western technology, even Western political organization (the sharia is not exclusive in this regard), Islamic countries responded by accepting the challenges of development, as is evident in a number of segments of Islamic society.

Following the collapse of communism, Orthodox Christianity has been reaffirmed in that, unlike the Catholic and Protestant countries of the Western bloc, where the church enjoyed greater support, Orthodox countries had experienced various degrees of de-Christianisation. It was reported that there were only about fifty churches in the Moscow area in 1988, while by 1993 their number had increased to 250! The millennium of Christianity in Russia was celebrated in 1989, the year that perestroika began. At that time, only fourteen Orthodox monasteries were active in Russia. Contrasted with the situation in Serbia, this illustrates the level of de-Christianisation carried out by communism while in power.

The same is true of the Islamic parts of the former Soviet Union. In 1989, according to Huntington, there were 160 mosques and one madrasa in Central Asia, while in 1993 that number stood at 10,000 mosques and ten madrasas.

Huntington analyses the conflicts that have broken out over the past few decades, and concludes that the largest number of them erupted along the fault-lines between Islamic and other civilizations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, conflict broke out between Serbs, Muslims and Croats. There are latent conflicts between Greece and Albania concerning the problems of minorities on either side of the border. The permanent conflict between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus continues, causing very strict division of the island and continually strained relations between these two countries, both of them members of NATO! In the Caucasus, Turkey and Armenia are traditional enemies. In the northern Caucasus region, the Chechens, Ingushes and other Muslim peoples have fought Russia over independence for two centuries. In the Volga basin, Muslim Tatars have been granted a degree of autonomy by Russia. The struggle of Muslims in China has been motivated by their refusal to assimilate, in which they are supported by other Islamic countries. All in all, according to Huntington, Muslims were involved in three-fourths of all wars between civilizations in the early 1990s. Huntington contends that Islam's borders are "bloody", and continues by saying that blood runs within its borders as well. Likewise, Muslim countries spent higher percentages of their national income on arms than did countries of other civilizations. Huntington is right in observing that the spiral of violence involving Islamic countries is limited to the late twentieth century.

The Causes of Violence

Huntington's analysis of conflicts in the world shows that the greatest number of conflicts during the last decade of the twentieth century arose along the faultlines where Islamic civilization clashed with other civilizations. These are

the results of quantitative research, and are not to be disputed. However, where causes are discussed, some additional questions are very much in order.

Huntington speaks of a historical legacy, i.e. great conquests and wars between Islamic countries and other civilizations.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity stood no chance before the onslaught of the Turks, particularly when we bear in mind that the clash between East and West within Christendom had led to Western indifference at the fall of Constantinople and Serbia in the middle of the fifteenth century.

Even if we assume that Islam is a more bellicose religion, we still have to account for the fact that extreme Islamic fundamentalism emerged only as late as the second half of the twentieth century. This could, perhaps, be explained by historical cycles, since Islamic expansionism, which reached its apex in the seventeenth century, was followed by an age of colonial conquests by Christian countries, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant alike. These conquests took place either along the border of the Islamic world (Russian conquests), in the Mediterranean region, or overseas, all the way to the Pacific.

The founders of the political philosophy of Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt and Pakistan during the second half of the twentieth century ascribed to Islam the role of a spiritual shield against Western ideas of democracy, the nation-state, and nationalism, which had been transformed, in the latter case, into a cult of the nation, while democracy had metamorphosed into the tyranny of the majority. These Christian notions were replaced by Islam, which could satisfy all man's spiritual and worldly needs. The Koran and the sharia lay down provisions for ordering the state and the family, criminal and civil law, and general rules of conduct. Secularism became a special target for fundamentalism, as a doctrine which took hold first in Turkey between the two World Wars and then, to a lesser degree, in other Islamic countries (Egypt, Iran and Pakistan). Fundamentalists contend that secularism constitutes a general rejection of the omnipotence of God, leading to loss of faith and atheism.

All of this is very much in evidence at the moment; yet it is difficult to accept the explanation that present-day militant fundamentalism dates back to the seventh century, the time of birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Demographic Explosion in Islamic Countries

The historical explanation for the emergence of extreme Islamic fundamentalism and the onslaught of terror throughout the world during the last decades of the twentieth century falls short of explaining why it emerged during precisely those decades, rather than, for instance, immediately after de-colonization, or even during the process of de-colonization itself, when conflicts with the colonial powers might have generated greater hatred and religious intolerance than after a few decades, which is supposedly a sufficiently long period of time for hatreds among nations once at war to subside.

Therefore, Huntington cites the demographic factor as a cause in his research, i.e. the huge demographic growth recorded by Islamic peoples all over the world. He says that population growth in Muslim countries and, especially, an explosion in that segment of the population aged 15 to 24, provides ample recruits for fundamentalism, terrorism, rebellion and migration, adding that, whereas economic growth strengthens Asian governments, demographic growth threatens Muslim governments and non-Muslim societies alike.

Demographic growth must keep pace with economic development. If, for instance, it is not possible to create one million new jobs, capacity for one million new students, one million new rooms, beds or pairs of shoes over a period of ten years, and one million new babies are nevertheless born, poverty is bound to emerge and become a source of aggression in any society. The discrepancy between demographic and economic growth in many countries has led to the introduction of birth control, which, in China, for instance, has brought about social traumas, migration and emigration, so that serious thought is now being given to alternative measures.

Huntington rightly points to the demographic factor in explaining the phenomenon of Islamic extremism during the last decades of the twentieth century. A true demographic explosion in Islamic countries, Huntington contends, is the main reason for the instability in the Muslim world's relations with other civilizations. A large number of unemployed males aged between 15 and 30 easily produces facile accusations against non-Muslim countries, especially the West and America, as the perceived culprits for their poverty and misery. Whatever other causes there

may be, Huntington claims that this factor will go a long way in explaining Muslim violence in the 1980s and 1990s. The maturing of this generation by the third decade of the twenty-first century, and the economic development of Muslim countries, if it ever comes to pass, may lead to a significant decrease in the inclination towards violence among Muslims and, hence, to a general decline in the frequency and intensity of war along the fault-lines between ci-vilizations.

Since demographic growth is the root cause of Muslim aggression in international relations, Huntington attributes the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo to the same cause. In 1961, 67 percent of the population of Kosovo was Albanian, and 24 percent Serbian. During the 1980s Kosovo became the most densely populated area in Yugoslavia. Since the Albanians came to power in Kosovo after 1970, terror and a lower standard of living, caused by a discrepancy between demographic and economic growth, influenced Serbs to migrate towards Belgrade and other areas in Central Serbia. Nonetheless, Serbs continued to consider Kosovo their sacred land, their Jerusalem. Faced with the fact that they were losing Kosovo, as they accounted for only 12 percent of its population by 1991, Serbs became ensnarled in the nationalist traps set by Milošević in his drive to power. The rest is history.

A similar situation prevailed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1961, Serbs accounted for 43 percent of the population, and Muslims for 26 percent. In 1991, the percentages were reversed: Serbs accounted for 31 percent and Muslims for 44 percent, while Croats amounted to only 17 percent. The figures Huntington presents clearly explain the goals of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina: ethnic cleansing on all sides.

Of course, the demographic factor cannot explain the fierce conflicts between Serbs and Croats, either in Bosnia and Herzegovina or in Croatia.

A Critique of the Demographic Theory

What is most surprising about Huntington's analysis is its use of the demographic factor as the main cause of the emergence of extreme Islamic fundamentalism, as well as a catalyst for possible future wars between Islamic and neighbouring civilizations.

The surprise for me comes from the fact that I had encountered this explanation before, during my studies in Paris in the early 1960s. During my very first contacts with French scholarship in the area of international relations, I had naturally become acquainted with the works of Raymond Aaron, France's leading sociologist and political scholar at that time. His book *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Paris 1962, was unquestionably the principal textbook of international relations in the French language. In this book Aaron offered a critique of the demographic theory of war, which had been expounded most consistently by Gaston Bouthoul in his work entitled *Les guerres, elements de polemologie*, published in Paris in 1951. For reasons which do not matter here, I accepted Aaron's critique and never returned to Bouthoul's theory in my subsequent studies of the policy of force and international conflicts.

My surprise was all the greater as I read the aforementioned arguments, quite unrelated to Bouthoul's fifty-year-old theory and Aaron's critique of ten years later, in Huntington's book. All the more so since both these books have been translated into English and published in America. Since I was a student of Aaron, I accepted his critique of Bouthoul's theory of the demographic cause of wars, which I shall now summarize by way of a critique of Huntington.

Bouthoul contends that young people, if their numbers outgrow the basic capacities of the economy in a given society, are pre-destined to "turbulence". They constitute a subversive force. Huntington does not commit the same mistake by explaining the phenomenon of aggression in the Muslim world using the demographic cause alone. As we have seen, he even makes allowance for the possibility that demographic tension will decrease in the near future (around the year 2030), and that with greater economic development the level of aggression will also decline. At this point, we can pose Aaron's question: Does the elimination of overpopulation free human societies from the danger of aggression and war? Clearly not, as history abounds with instances of war in which the problem of demographic pressure did not play a role at all. Did French expansionist policy during the Revolution and at the time of Napoleon disappear in the nineteenth century, when the birth rate fell in contrast to that recorded on the eve of the Revolution? Of course not. Did Germany replace France as an aggressive power in the second half of the nineteenth century due to an economic surplus in its population? Of course not. Quite the reverse is true: up until 1910, Germany was in the process of becoming the most powerful economic force in the world, and wished to play the role of the politically most powerful country as well. At that time, possession of colonies was the symbol of prestige and might, and

Germany wanted to take over in this field from the weaker England and France. Despite its economic growth after World War II, Germany is no longer an aggressive power which threatens the established system of international peace. For a number of years, Japan has been demographically stronger than it was in 1938, yet its behaviour displays no traces of its former aggressiveness. No excess of labour force was recorded in Japan in 1938 either, yet Japan did embark upon a world war, contends Aaron.

Aaron poses another question not found in other critiques of demographic, biological or similar theories. If overpopulation in a society is treated as a consequence of the discrepancy between economic development and demographic growth, leading to poverty among certain social groups and, consequently, unemployment, unrest, strikes, rebellion and, finally, revolution, then the question of whether all social strata are affected by the negative consequences of this discrepancy is a very pertinent one indeed. The answer is that they are not, certainly not in Islamic countries, whose ruling minorities abound in riches and luxury. The case in point calls for social reform, rather than for directing social tensions outwards, since this is not feasible in the long run. This contention has been proved empirically by revolutions, beginning with the revolution in France and continuing with the revolutions throughout Europe in 1848 and the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. The revolution in Russia broke out regardless of the attempt to lessen social tensions through military adventures meant to heighten patriotism and quell social discontent among the poor. It was forgotten that a sword cuts both ways, that is, that war can easily lead to disillusion.

Likewise, overpopulation in Kosovo could not have served as a cause of conflict between Serbs and Albanians had they addressed their development problems in the way the Netherlands – certainly the most densely populated, yet not overpopulated, country of Europe – succeeded in doing. There is no grounds for comparison between the Netherlands and Kosovo, of course, but it is correct to say that the mere fact of overpopulation is not sufficient to bring about internecine slaughter in order to "diminish the number of living souls." The Albanians of Kosovo embarked on a struggle for secession from Serbia, unlike the Catholic minority in the south of the Netherlands, or the Frisians in the east.

In his critique, Aaron points to Europe in the nineteenth century, a time when it experienced the greatest economic and demographic growth in its history, which also meant its largest percentage of young people. Nevertheless, no gap between economic and demographic growth, to the detriment of the latter, ever occurred. Balanced growth was recorded in Germany in particular up until 1914. However, it did not prevent the outbreak of World War I, which went down in history as the bloodiest war thus far. Yet it was soon to be overtaken by World War II: not because economic growth in Europe was halted by the great economic crisis of 1929-1933, but because this crisis stalled the democratic development of Europe and made it possible for Hitler to take power in Germany, and for dictatorships to arise in almost all the new European countries created after World War I.

Demographic fluctuations are not a permanent or lasting feature of any civilization, country or continent. Aaron takes Europe as an example, illustrating a number of periods from the tenth century to the present day. If religious wars and occasional outbreaks of disease (plague) are disregarded, the phenomenon of changes in birth rate is something that has frequently been recorded as a socio-biological phenomenon in Europe over these ten centuries.

It is not possible to contend that there was an economic surplus of population in Europe in 1913. However, the question of Lebensraum was indeed posed by Hitler in between the two world wars. Hitler came to power in Germany at a time when it was plagued by ten-million unemployment and an economy destroyed by crisis. In these circumstances, political demagogues like Hitler were easily able to persuade people to blame foreigners (Jews) and foreign countries (the victors of World War I) for their misfortune, thus leading to a desire for revenge and racial hatred. No revenge is possible without hatred, and so war could begin.

According to Aaron, it is impossible to prove a connection between an excess of young people and bellicosity. Historically, wars have erupted irregardless of any such rule. However, it is true that an increase in the birth rate augments the number of young people in a society. If the institutions of that society have directed young people towards aggression and violence, as was done by Hitler, or is being done today by terrorist organizations, then it would be fair to argue that extreme Islamic fundamentalism follows exactly this course. However, has Islamic fundamentalism given rise to demographic expansion, or has this expansion produced extreme fundamentalism? In any event, historical experience points to different causes of conflicts and conquests, whereas the demographic factor has been used by those who saw conquest and war as the best way of improving the fortunes of their states or strengthening their own power.

There have been various motivations and causes of war in the history of states. Among these is plunder, which is embarked upon so that a community or its leaders may secure their position in the struggle for survival or power. If, in the process, plunder makes up for a lack of economic creativity, then it goes quite some distance towards utilizing excess labour force, which heightens tension and threatens to seize power and riches from the ruling minority.

However, in the case of crises (poverty) caused by a discrepancy between the number of births and economic development, war has never been the proper vehicle to address the question of economic development. Every war is fraught with the danger of being lost. Imagine the risks of war today! Clear evidence of this, resulting from quantitative research, is given by the great sociologist Pitirim A. Sorokin, a Russian emigre and American scholar, in his monumental work *War and Revolution*. His research proves by statistics that all states which sought to improve their quality of life through war or revolution have found themselves in a worse situation than before it, even after the victorious outcome of such an "enterprise".

The colonial wars of the modern era could be considered successful in enhancing the wealth of the nations that fought them. However, there is no need to demonstrate that these were not real wars, given that the European countries made their conquests almost without losses, and with very small military forces and expenses.

Ways of Averting the Clash

The process of de-colonization of the Islamic countries began between the two world wars, as, by and large, it did in other Asian countries as well. At that time, there were two independent Arabic states: Egypt and Iraq; however, their independence was restricted by the main colonial powers, England and France. In point of fact, sharp social divisions existed in the Arabic world, between the ruling class of landowners and the mass of small-holding or landless peasants. A merchant class arose between these two, gradually assuming political leadership. Class interests led to an alliance between landowners and Western colonialists. King Farouk of Egypt, as well as the Iraqi kings, were in fact British vassals who were concerned primarily with their own personal wealth and luxury.

Great upheavals in the Arabic world brought forth revolutionary changes, characterized by a nationalistic rather than a social orientation. In the beginning, nationalist movements in the Arabic world and, for that matter, in other Islamic countries were inhibited by a greater sense of Islamic identity. Similarly, the struggle for liberation from colonial rule was not characterized by bloody wars, except in Indochina and Algeria. Thus it may be said that the "peaceful struggle" for national liberation left no hatred in its wake to act as the seed of future conflicts.

At the time of their accession to independence, the cultural elites of these countries were, by and large, Western-educated ones. Over time, however, they established their own national universities, which generated new elites who were not influenced by Western cultural ideas. Pan-Arab nationalism was fed by secular ideas of Western provenance. However, two things changed its course and directed it towards Islamic fundamentalism. First was the social and economic underdevelopment of the greater number of Arabic and other Islamic countries. This was the result of the fact that, except for oil, conditions for international trade had remained at a level which was economically unfavourable to underdeveloped countries. This gap continued to grow, to the detriment of Islamic countries which, as a rule, numbered among the world's least developed ones. In this way, a conviction gradually took hold that the acceptance of Western modernization and values in some countries (Iran under the Shah) had not enabled them to catch up with the industrialized West. Espousal of Islam was, and remains, an attempt to find spiritual sources of social development in one's own identity.

However, it should be noted that Islam needs the same kind of reformation that once revived Christian civilization. Freeing social processes from the dogma of a church one thousand years after the latter's inception seems to be a precondition for the renaissance of any civilization based on religion. Indeed, the sharia contains no norms prohibiting technological, scientific or even political modernization. It does not forbid urbanization, education of the masses, or social and health insurance. What is the problem, then?

Demographic expansion is not something which, historically, can be cited as characteristic of the Islamic world alone. In the nineteenth century, Europe experienced similar demographic growth. In addition to a number of other factors, one aspect of Islamic dogma which has evidently stalled development is the position of women in the Islamic world. It is not possible to exclude 50 percent of the population – i.e. the percentage women account for in any society – from playing a role in that society, reducing it to biological procreation alone. No society that prohibits half of its population from working can make progress. This also negatively affects other aspects of social life:

human rights, in which women's rights rank very high; social organization, including the political system; culture and education. According to the available data, only 4 percent of women in Arabic countries complete elementary school! What can those 96 percent of illiterate women do in a modern, technologically developed society? To illustrate this argument regarding the underdevelopment of the Islamic world, it is necessary to study parallel data from Turkey, where the situation is unquestionably different. These differences are apparent even to a random traveller, albeit no definite conclusions should be made based on casual observation.

The assistance provided by the developed world to the reform process in the Islamic world should not be perceived as meddling. It should be made clear that the desire is to help, not control. The developed world's attitude needs to change if we wish to attain "sustainable development" on the Earth.